

Gathering Secrets Is Easy



Colby, who was CIA director from 1973 to 1976 and who once headed the agency's covert intelligence-gathering activities, met recently with editors of The San Diego Union. Here are some of his comments:

Answer: Law states that if the CIA does anything other than gather pure intelligence, such action must be approved by the President and must be reported to appropriate congressional authority, which at the moment includes seven committees.

A: At the moment it is not.

The CIA needs legislation to protect intelligence sources from disclosure by employees. There is a law which punishes an Agriculture Department employee who releases crop statistics without authorization, and there is a law which punishes the Internal Revenue Service employee who releases an income tax return. We need a similar law to punish an employee who leaks secret intelligence.

Q: Haven't some CIA agents taken unauthorized action?

Of course there have been a few incidents of individual action, but generally it's pretty clear that the agents in the field were under direct orders. The only real question that remains involves the various assassination plots against Castro. And there, after eight months of investigation, the Church Committee said it really couldn't determine who gave the order, who condoned it, who approved it, where it stopped above or inside CIA.

Certainly it was once a tradition that certain things were better not written down but said. In 1962, I believe it was, Attorney General Kennedy learned that there had been some attempts against Castro involving this stupid operation with the Mafia. His only comment was, 'don't get in touch with the Mafia again without telling me.'

A: Certainly many people were frightened. They said they couldn't work for us anymore.

However, the CIA can now go back to these people and show them the final report; we can show them we did not reveal our connections to foreign intelligence services:

We can demonstrate our ability to run an intelligence business on American principles — while keeping important secrets.

Q: How does the Soviet Union conduct its intelligence operation around the world?

A: The Soviets have learned intelligence gathering from us.

Their intelligence officers now operate in the open, exploiting open sources. They have gotten rid of their

polite lunch with someone and exchange perfectly open assessments of what is going on.

The most important thing to remember about the gathering of intelligence is that it's the assessment not the collection that is difficult.

The Soviets have established an institute for the study of the U.S.A. They flatter the CIA because they realize the importance of research.

However, they still bump into the odd sergeant in the bar in Bangkok and offer him \$10,000 for information.

Q: What is your reaction to criticism that the CIA's information prior to the last Mideast War was inaccurate?

A: Intelligence is not crystal-ball perfect. It is designed to give us an appreciation of the forces involved, what the problems are likely to be.

In the Middle East war, for example, indications in the spring were that if there was no diplomatic and political progress, the chances of war would increase.

The estimate was that Israeli would do very well.

These items turned out to be true.

The fact that was wrong was the statement made on the night of the Arab attack when we had contradictory information from both sides which indicated military action might only be another attempt to apply pressure for negotiations.

We were wrong for assuming what the Arabs ought to have done, rather than what they might do.

If we accurately predict what can happen, our government can go to work on both sides of the conflict to avoid hostilities. We have stopped several wars from starting exactly in that way.

Q: Do you think anything useful will come out of the new investigation into the assassinations of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King?

A: The only useful thing that might happen is to settle the conspiracy theory.

I think the investigation is legitimate, although I doubt there will be a substantial difference in the overall evaluation.

Oswald operated alone.

I am also convinced there was no CIA involvement in the events leading to the assassination of Mr. Kennedy. I know of no information that links Oswald with Castro other than Oswald participated in a few pro-Cuba parades in New Orleans. Castro, at one point in September of 1963, was said to have told a reporter that the people threatening Cuba's leaders should look to their own safety.

Q: Is Castro's recent hard-line due to Soviet pressure?

A: Castro in the early 60's thought the Cuban revolution was going to sweep Latin America. The U.S. put together a political, economic and military aid program, and at the end of the 60's Castro had not swept Latin America. Castro then began to talk of normalization, and we may be getting back to some reasonable relationship. He has changed his line with the Latin countries, trying to establish state to state relations instead of revolutionary relations.

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